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ABSTRACT

The application of hermeneutic theory to the study of the oral history interview is proposed in this paper. The first section of the paper indicates why the oral interview is central to the approach of the oral historian; it then defines oral history as a communicative process and suggests an approach to investigating the oral interview that uses hermeneutics as an interpretive social science. The second section explains some essential presuppositions of hermeneutic theory, shows how the oral history interview may be represented thematically as having four distinct but interdependent hermeneutical relationships, and tells how the application of a dialectical logic to the oral interview yields categories of communicative interaction that describe how meaning is constructed and transformed in the interview. In its final section, the paper proposes research questions to be answered in a study of the oral history interview as a hermeneutical situation and describes proposed research methodology involving conversational analyses of three types of data: videotapes of oral history interviews, audiotapes of stimulated recall sessions with selected participants, and interviewers' free-response written descriptions of their expectations about the input and the output of their respective interviews. (GT)

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Communication in the Oral History Interview: Investigating Problems of Interpreting Oral Data

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Hans Jonas argues that the peculiarity of historical understanding is not so much a function of our distance from the past as it "is given with it." "Present understanding," Jonas reasons, "has the aid of speech and counterspeech, historical understanding has only the one-sided speech of the past."[1] As a general proposition the preceding statement is true enough, but historians of the recent past are not so encumbered. Armed with the ubiguitous tape-recorder, historians are using speech and counterspeech to elucidate the past. In the thirty years since the establishment of the Columbia Oral History Research Office, oral history has gained a legitimate lease in the American university. With over 250 well-established programs, an Oral History Association numbering more than 1,400 members, not to mention its burgeoning use as a pedagogical device, it is not surprising that a recent report of the Rockefeller Foundation could conclude that oral history has become "academia's growth industry."[2]

Because the interview/conversation is the central feature of this new approach to gathering historical information, we submit that students of speech communication can find in oral history a profitable area for research. Moreover, we will contend that the vital nexus, linking the communication theorist and the historian, is hermeneutics (the science of interpretation). Our approach to oral history as a problem in communication and interpretation will be introduced in three parts: 1) the rationale for examining the oral history interview: 2) the philosophical-theoretical base for the investigation; and 3) the research design.

RATIONALE

Despite its extraordinary growth and its long tradition in Europe, oral history in the United States has failed to establish criteria for evaluating its product. The President of the Oral History Association recently observed that "after a dozen years of growth the Oral History Association has not progressed far in establishing a discipline or reaching and serving the huge number of people who seem to be doing 'our thing.'" Lamenting that oral historians have "no set rules, no authority or training that can produce a predictable and acceptable pattern of behavior," President Moore asked,". . . is this true because there is no such criterion or is it true because we have not yet defined what that discipline is?"[3] Another historian has written, "The sad condition of our theoretical knowledge about oral history, and the lack of serious efforts to think through exactly what an oral interview is or should be, how it is to be analyzed, or for what purposes, has resulted in a situation of endless activity without goal or meaning."[4]

This proposal argues that criteria can be established for interpreting oral data, but only if the interview is treated as the central feature of the new investigative procedure. As Grele observes, the oral transcript "cannot be divorced from the circumstances of its creation, which of necessity is one of audience participation and face to face confrontation."[5] By conducting an examination of the communication variables involved, grounded in an appropriate theoretical base, the difficult task of evaluating oral data can be facilitated. By establishing evaluative criteria which are specific to the oral history interview/conversation, not only will historians be better able to admonish what President Moore calls the "undisciplined, unethical,

inhumanistic practitioners of what passes as oral history,"[6] but students of conversational analysis should also gain a better understanding of how historical consciousness is articulated through conversation.

To understand better the advantages to be gained from the proposed research, it is necessary first, to define what is meant by oral history; and second, to suggest an approach to the problem which uses hermeneutics as an interpretive social science.

Definition

Oral history is in the broadest sense another term for conversation. Its generic function is to transmit a culture by word of mouth. It can include everything from folklore, to the psycho-analytic interview, to a grandparent reminiscing about the Depression. Oral history is therefore conversation which is defined by its purpose or function. Our research focuses on those oral history programs whose primary objective is the recording of oral data to supplement the historian's work in more traditional forms of written sources. The purpose of these interview/conversations is to corroborate, to correct, and to extend traditional historical inquiry.

But oral history must not be understood as simply another form of historical investigation, requiring customary procedures for testing evidence. The most apparent difference is that the evidence originates in an act of oral communication, not in writing. Vansina writes,". . . each type of historical source [oral and written] not only has its limitations, but also has its own particular way of seeing things--its own particular bias," and that "the existence of such bias means that each type of source has its own advantages as a means of conveying information about the past."[7] Gadamer explains this fundamental distinction between writing and speaking when he notes, "Writing has the

methodological advantage that it presents the hermeneutical [interpretational] problem in all its purity, detached from everything psychological." But, Gadamer also finds writing to be correspondingly disadvantaged when contrasted with oral conversation, namely "that no one could come to the aid of the written word if it falls victim to misunderstanding, intentional or unintentional."[8]

It is the prospect of coming to the aid of understanding through speech and counterspeech that gives oral history its unique properties. Unlike written testimony, the historical evidence derived through conversation is a joint intellectual product. The historian as interviewer becomes an active agent in the creation of an historical record. The interviewee provides the erlebnis, the "lived-through experience" of a past event.[9] It is the interaction of interviewer and interviewee, bringing with them conflicting perspectives, that gives the interview its creative potential. Under these conditions, it becomes the duty of the oral historian to articulate this conflict in such a way as to allow the interviewee to speak his mind. This is accomplished when the historian succeeds in making problematic the "taken-for-granted" perspectives of the interviewee without allowing his own biases to intrude. One oral historian put the case well:

> Our aim is to bring to conscious articulation the ideological problematic of the interviewee, to reveal the cultural context in which information is being conveyed, and to thus transform an individual story into a cultural narrative, and, thereby, to more fully understand what happened in the past. While this can only be done through the interplay of the various conceptions of the past held by both the interviewer and interviewee [what we term conflict], the particular present ideological conceptions of the interviewer should not structure that articulation.[10]

Thus, oral history may be defined as the process whereby an historian seeks to create historical evidence through conversation with a

person whose life experience is deemed memorable. The process involves the understanding and interpreting of a past event in such a way as to sediment its meaning at a given point in time.

Approach to the Problem

The preceding definition emphasizes oral history as a communicative process. Through this interaction, the historian/interviewer seeks to move the interviewee to a recreation of the historical event(s). It is only by understanding the nature of the communication and the influence of the communication variables on the data gathered that the historian is able to evaluate properly the evidence he has obtained. The paradigm of hermeneutics provides the foundation for this understanding.

Hermeneutic theorists reason that a human understanding of existence is conditioned by the linguistic possibilities present in a given culture. These linguistic possibilities, diverse forms that language assumes in its diachronic (historical) development, are the "signifying milieu" wherein humans experience and understand their existence. The "performing," or actualizing, of these linguistic possibilities so as to structure experience(s) is the process of interpretation. All interpretation occurs in the universe of linguistic possibilities that history "projects" toward a human being. Until they are worked out and performed in the interpretative acts of speaking and writing, they remain in a potential or silent state. The ways in which these linguistic possibilities come into being through interpretation signify their particular meaning within the context of communication.

The purpose and nature of the oral history interview require an understanding of what occurs when interviewer and interviewee seek to

recreate an event. This understanding must be grounded in research focusing on those communication variables influencing the interviewer(X) and the interviewee (Y) as they jointly move toward the event (Z). The interview must be conceptualized as a synchronic communication event in which the construction of meaning emerges or unfolds through the interaction of interviewer and interviewee. The construction of meaning will be a by-product of the understanding and interpretation of both interviewer and interviewee as they perform the linguistic possibilities within the situation. The meaning thus constructed and its relationship to future understanding ultimately will depend on the "communicative performance" of both interviewer and interviewee.

While the literature on interviewing is replete with admonitions and instructions for preparing and conducting the interview, it possesses little of substantive value for the oral historian. Generalizations about the nature of interviews, as the journalistic interview or the counseling interview, do not suffice in understanding and evaluating the oral history interview. Only by combining the perspectives of philosophical hermeneutics and communication theory can we begin to investigate systematically the oral history interview and formulate criteria by which the historian can evaluate his research.

The type of investigation suggested here is facilitated by a research team which draws from differing academic perspectives. The present research team, consisting of a historian, a specialist in philosophical hermeneutics, and a communication theorist, has been assembled through grants made possible by the Ford Foundation in cooperation with the University of Alabama and by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The research team operates out of the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre and provides a two-semester program of instruction at the advanced undergraduate/graduate level.

Seven additional departments and programs within the University cooperate through an Advisory Board.

The research team will apply hermeneutics as an "interpretive social science" by following Kockelmans suggestions concerned with interpreting historical phenomena. Specifically, we will: a) establish a philosophical-theoretical base which elucidates how the process of interpretation occurs; b) use the philosophical-theoretical base to direct the observation and description of the specific interpretive process under investigation; c) identify those variables that "shed light on the question of why the facts are as they appear to be;" and d) make predictions based on those facts "as to what may be expected in the future."[11]

Kockelmans's approach will be applied to interview/conversations with elites as contrasted with non-elites. By focusing on elites, we reduce the number of variables involved, thereby making initial research findings more meaningful and subsequent research beyond the scope of this proposal more profitable. We define elites in the broad terms suggested by Wilkie in his study of Elitelore--governing as contrasted with non-governing. Wilkie explains, "Since the elite lead and the non-elite follow, life is viewed from differing perspectives. Whereas the latter develop lore which allows them to make sense out of situations beyond their control, the former develop a special lore to justify their attempts to control society."[12]

Because elites operate within the framework of a lore (assumptions, often unarticulated, that govern actions), they represent an ideal challenge for the interviewer whose duty it is to articulate the conflict between the "taken-for-granted" assumptions of the interviewee and other perspectives that exist concerning the historical

event. Schutz notes that "the taken-for-granted (das Fraglos-gegeben) is always that particular level of experience which presents itself as not in need of further analysis." "Nevertheless," Schutz concludes, "a change of attention can transform something that is taken for granted into something that is problematical."[13] As noted earlier, it is this change of attention, the making problematical, that gives the oral history interview its unique creative potential.

Rationale Summary

In the preceding pages we have indicated why the oral historian must confront the interview/conversation as the central feature of this new method, defined oral history as a communicative process and provided an approach to the problem. This descriptive rationale yields important directives for examining the oral history interview as an experience in communication wherein both the interviewer and the interviewee are concerned primarily with interpreting an historical phenomenon so that it may be understood in a meaningful way. While the benefits of this proposal pertain directly to the oral historian, research findings should yield important results for understanding conversation as a process, an important function of which is to transmit culture from one generation to the next.

The following pages will explain the philosophical-theoretical base for the investigation and the research design to be employed. The philosophical grounding is found in the theoretical paradigm known as "philosophical hermeneutics."

The Philosophical-Theoretical Base

Applying the theory of philosophical hermeneutics to the oral history interview necessitates the acceptance of three essential

presuppositions of hermeneutic theory (as such theory evolves from the writings of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur).[14] (1) The oral historian must realize that the interpretation of any historical phenomenon always is performed within the universe of linguistic possibilities, and that these linguistic possibilities as performed mark out the historicality of human experience. Thus, the historical "happening of a tradition" is hermeneutic in nature, i.e., it is an ongoing process of understanding-interpretation-meaning. (2) The interpretation of an historical phenomenon always is guided by the prejudices that an interpreter has at a specific moment in time. When such prejudices, as they induce meanings of an historical phenomenon, fail to provide direction toward what the phenomenon actually means for the interpreter's own culture, such prejudices must be reformulated. (3) An act of interpretation must always be concerned directly with the historical phenomenon itself, e.g., not with an interviewee's intended meaning, but with what the intended meaning is about. Only the historical phenomenon has priority concerning its true meaning. Because any understanding of an historical phenomenon varies over time due to the different linguistic possibilities that interpreters perform when signifying the phenomenon's supposed meaning, all interpretations of the phenomenon are to a certain extent "subjective"; they are, therefore, subject to error and are only significant as means to an end. The "end" here being the historical phenomenon itself.

When the theory of philosophical hermeneutics is used to structure the oral history interview, the interview is seen as a "hermeneutical situation." As a hermeneutical situation the oral history interview may be represented thematically as having four distinct but interdependent hermeneutical relationships: (1) the relationship

between the interviewer (X) and the interviewee (Y); (2) the relationship between the interviewer (X) and the historical phenomenon (Z) to be interpreted; (3) the relationship between the interviewee (Y) and the historical phenomenon (Z); and (4) the interdependent relationship between the interviewer (X), the interviewee (Y), and the historical phenomenon (Z). The hermeneutic nature of these four relationships is described as follows:

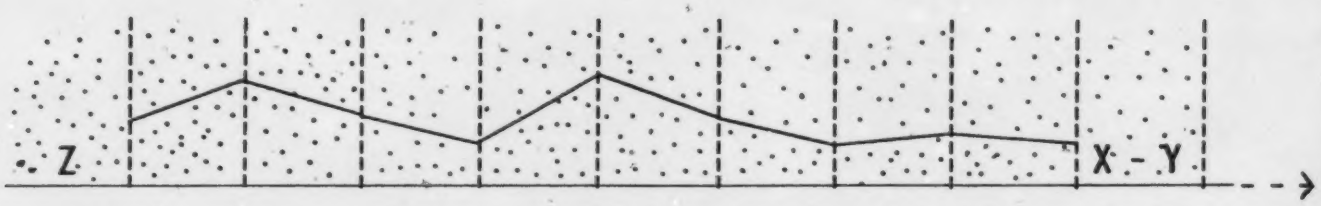
(1) The X-Y Relationship: This relationship is "synchronic" in nature. That is, the communication occurring between the interviewer and the interviewee is situation bound; it takes place at a specific moment in time. Through this relationship the other relationships become operative.

(2) The X-Z Relationship: This relationship is "diachronic" in nature. That is, what the oral historian (as interviewer-interpreter) knows about the historical phenomenon in the present, presupposes the existence of an historical tradition, evolving from the phenomenon, that has developed through time. The evolution of this historical tradition is, in essence, a succession of synchronic moments. These synchronic moments of understanding, interpreting, and giving meaning to the historical phenomenon are such that its meaning is conveyed to the present.

(3) The Y-Z Relationship: This relationship also is diachronic in nature. What the interviewee knows about the historical phenomenon, however, is based on a different kind of experience than that of the interviewer. The interviewee in an oral history interview has actually experienced the historical phenomenon as a lived event occurring in the past. From a phenomenological standpoint, the interviewee has had a "lived through experience" of the historical phenomenon under investigation. Since any lived experience can acquire

meaning only to the extent that it is "reflected upon" after it occurs, the interviewee's knowledge of the event develops diachronically. What the interviewee knows about his/her lived-through experience in the present, is dependent on how he/she understood, interpreted, and gave meaning to the experience in various synchronic moments occurring through time.

(4) The X-Y-Z Relationship: This relationship is both synchronic and diachronic in nature, for it defines the three preceding relationships as a whole, as the "hermeneutical situation" of the oral history interview. The following is a way of visualizing this hermeneutical situation.



Temporal Distance of Historical Tradition

In the model, (Z) represents the historical phenomenon that has taken place in a given period of time. The dots (:::) represent the universe of linguistic possibilities that can be performed in understanding the historical phenomenon and interpreting its meaning. The vertical dotted lines (|||) represent those synchronic moments wherein a given culture or a person (e.g., the interviewee (Y) who lived through the historical phenomenon) has reflected on the phenomenon and performed certain linguistic possibilities in interpreting the phenomenon's meaning. The diagonal line (∼∧) represents the limit of those linguistic possibilities that were performed in certain synchronic moments.

Thus the meaning of (Z) at any given synchronic moment consists of those linguistic possibilities that are contained within the synchronic moment (under the diagonal line). That the meaning of (Z) experienced in any one synchronic moment could be identical to a new meaning of (Z) experienced in a future synchronic moment is an impossibility. The identity of an historical phenomenon (what it is, or means) necessarily varies over time. Ebeling elucidated this difficult issue when he noted that "both factors, identity and variability, belong inseparably together and are linked to one another in the process of interpretation, whose very nature is to say the same thing in a different way and, precisely by virtue of saying it in a different way, to say the same thing. If, by way of pure repetition, we were to say today the same thing that was said 2,000 years ago, we would only be imagining that we were saying the same thing, while actually we would be saying something quite different."[15] Furthermore, whether all the linguistic possibilities could ever be performed in interpreting the "true" meaning of (Z) is not determinable. Gadamer explained that "We cannot see a linguistic world from above, for there is no point of view outside the experience of the world in language from which it could itself become an object."[16]

The synchronic relationship between (X) and (Y) in the oral history interview takes form in a situation which has been created to establish the meaning of (Z). What meaning will emerge and how it will affect future understanding will be dependent on how both the interviewer and the interviewee achieve "hermeneutical conversation."

The basic premise underlying the procedure of hermeneutical conversation was stated by Gadamer: "To conduct a [hermeneutical] conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the object to which the

parties in the conversation are directed. It requires that one does not try to outargue the other person, but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion."[17] In the oral history interview this premise must be adhered to rigorously. Although the oral historian may have an "expert" knowledge concerning the traditional conceptions of what the historical phenomenon signifies, it is the interviewee's interpretation of his/her lived-through experience that provides a potentially new dimension of meaning about the historical phenomenon. Thus, the oral historian must not let his knowledge cloud what the interviewee may reveal about the meaning of the phenomenon. Of primary importance to the oral historian, however, is not the interviewee's interpretation but what this interpretation is about. How then should this "open communication" of hermeneutical conversation be enacted in the oral history interview?

Gadamer stated that hermeneutical conversation must be conducted in terms of the truth of reality. The truth of reality is constituted through the process of understanding, interpretation, and meaning which, for Gadamer, is a "dialectical process" defining reality as the infinite realm of human experience.[18] The meaning of reality that emerges through a person's interpretative understanding of his/her experiences is only a partial (finite) meaning of reality as a whole. Meaning, therefore, is constantly being constructed and transformed throughout the history of a human being; meaning emerges out of the dialectical conflict of a person's past, present, and future interpretative understandings of reality. Hermeneutical conversation materializes only when this conflict evolves through communicative interactions that adhere to the dialectical process.

Although Gadamer offered no specific categories for operationalizing the process of hermeneutical conversation, Hyde described a dialectical logic that is useful in tracing the process.[19] Applying this logic to the oral history interview yields four categories which describe how meaning is constructed and transformed in this type of interview.

Communicative Interaction. Communicative interaction refers to the different forms that communicative performances can assume. In the oral history interview, the communicative performance is that of a "face to face" interaction. The development of the communicative performance of the oral history interview is contingent on how the conflict inherent in differing perspectives of an historical phenomenon is managed after it is articulated.

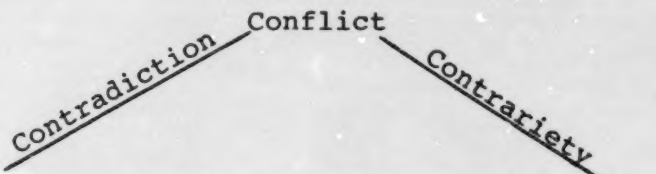
Conflict is the recognition by both (X) and (Y) of a lack of agreement in their separate understandings, interpretations, and meanings of any feature of (Z). For example, a feature (Z_1) of (Z) may be the role played by the interviewee during the historical phenomenon under investigation. (Y) will have the perspective of a lived-through experience. (X) will have a perspective based on traditional historical research, perhaps a lived-through experience, perhaps other interviews. Conflict between these differing perspectives is an inherent part of the situation. The way in which the conflict is managed by the participants after it has been articulated will determine how the conflict will manifest itself in the interview. Conflict can take one of two forms that characterize the interview relationship between (X) and (Y). These forms are contradiction and contrariety.

Contradiction occurs when (X) and (Y) reify their separate understandings, interpretations, and meanings of any feature of (Z). The general form of contradiction is (X) affirms his/her world-view and (Y)

affirms his/her world-view and the disagreement is not resolved. The appearance of agreement could result if either (X) and (Y) affirmed his/her world view and the other party submitted to that view while not accepting it. This, we term acquiescence. Acquiescence, however, does not represent agreement and contradiction remains.

Contradiction may be diagrammed as follows:

Communicative Interaction (concerning Z)



⌊a⌋ (X) affirms his/her world view and
(Y) affirms his/her world view.

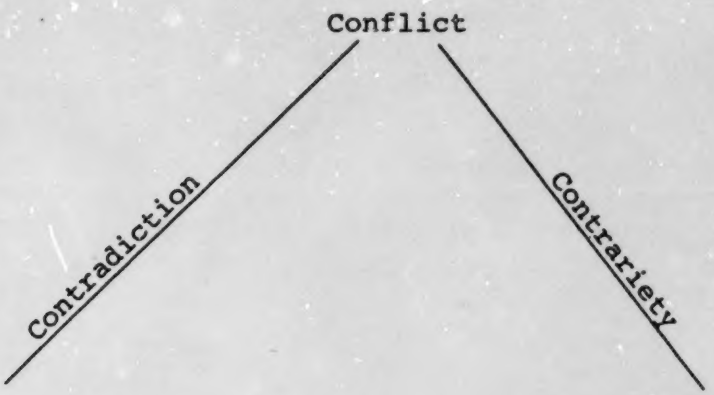
⌊a_1⌋ (X) affirms his/her world view and
(Y) acquiesces to (X).

⌊a_2⌋ (Y) affirms his/her world view and
(X) acquiesces to (Y).

Contrariety occurs when both (X) and (Y) maintain their separate understandings, interpretations, and meanings of any feature of (Z) while acknowledging the potential validity of the other's world-view. The general form of contrariety is (X) affirms his/her world-view and affirms the potential validity of (Y)'s world-view while (Y) affirms his/her world-view and affirms the potential validity of (X)'s world-view. A relationship of contrariety is the indicator that the dialectical process of hermeneutical conversation is taking place. That is, both (X) and (Y) mutually agree to assume the "risk" that their

respective world-views may be false. There are four potential transformations of contrariety as the following diagram indicates:

Communicative Interaction (concerning Z)



$[b_1]$ The world-view of (X) affirmed; the world-view of (Y) disaffirmed.

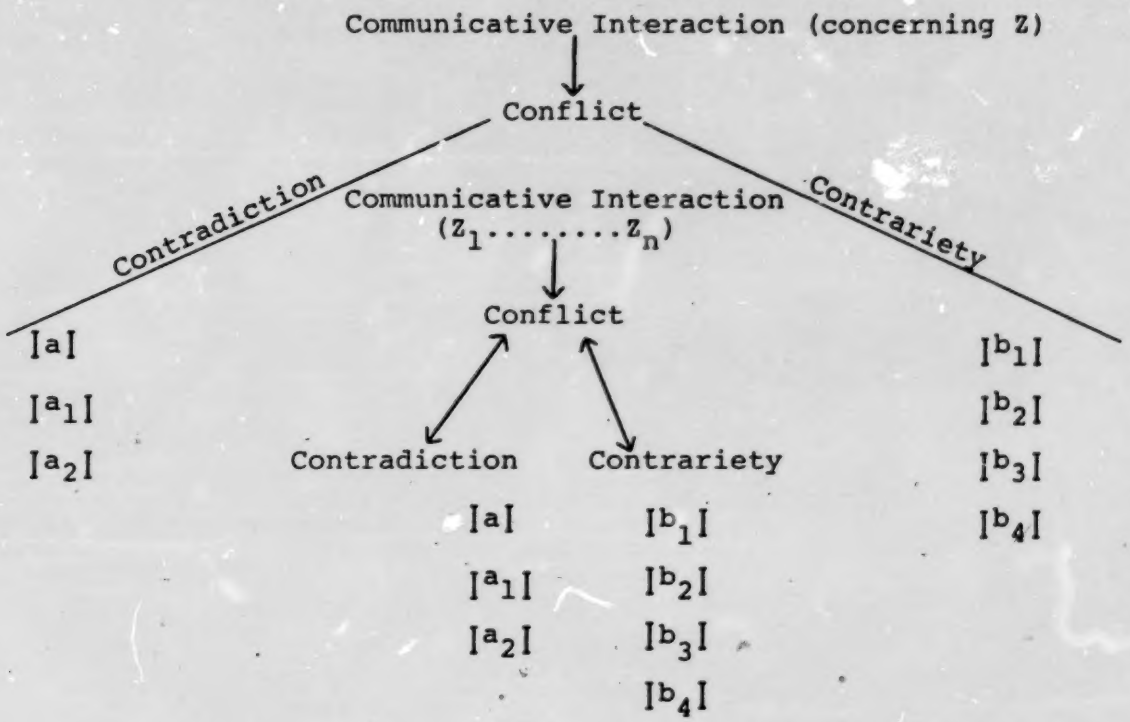
$[b_2]$ The world-view of (Y) affirmed; the world-view of (X) disaffirmed.

$[b_3]$ The world-views of both (X) and (Y) are affirmed as these world-views are synthesized and acquire new meaning.

$[b_4]$ The world-views of both (X) and (Y) are disaffirmed as new meaning of (Z) emerges.

In transformations $|b_3|$ and $|b_4|$ the meaning of (Z) is synthetic; it transcends both (X)'s and (Y)'s separate understandings, interpretations, and meanings of any feature of (Z).

Combining the parts of the diagram illustrates how the meaning of (Z) is constructed during an oral history interview.



Note that as the diagram indicates contradiction concerning a feature of (Z) may ultimately become a relationship of contrariety provided that both parties are willing to return to the level of conflict and again articulate their separate and different world-views. Should this occur meaning may be changed. Should this not occur, the meaning articulated at the level of contradiction will remain. The same is true of contrariety. Transformations $|b_1|$ $|b_2|$ $|b_3|$ $|b_4|$ may be transformed again if, during the interview, they are made problematic. The meaning may become a different transformation or the participants may move from contrariety to conflict and ultimately to contradiction.

The meaning of (Z) is a product of how the meaning of (Z_1.....Z_n) is determined. It must be remembered, however, that the meaning of (Z) is more than a summation of the meaning of (Z_1.....Z_n). The meaning of (Z) is an ongoing hermeneutical process of understanding, interpretation and meaning. Thus, future meaning will be something other than the meaning (X) and (Y) determined.

Observing and Describing the Interpretative Process

This study of the oral history interview as a hermeneutical situation is designed to answer four research questions:

1. What are the constitutive elements of the oral history interview?
2. What rules govern the organization of interaction during the oral history interview?
3. What patterns of content and structure in the recorded interviews approximate the paradigm of hermeneutical conversation?
4. What historical evidence is generated as interviewer and interviewee recreate the event(s)?

Answers to these questions will be provided by: (1) conducting conversational analyses of video taped oral history interviews; (2) comparing regularities in interview structure and content with the theoretical paradigm of structure and content in hermeneutical conversation; and, (3) deriving descriptions of meaning construction relative to the historical evidence which emerges out of the recorded interviews.

The combination of results will provide a foundation upon which subsequent theoretical explanations of oral history interview conversation can be tested. In addition, the results will generate conclusions about interview communication in oral history which will aid

historians in evaluating the historical evidence obtained.

Data:

Three types of data will be used: (1) video tapes of 48 oral history interviews: (2) audio tapes of stimulated recall sessions with selected participants; and, (3) interviewers' free-response written descriptions of their expectations regarding the input and the output of their respective interviews.

Since this project represents the descriptive phase of an on-going program of research in oral history interviewing, unobtrusive recording of "actual interaction" will be mandatory. Because nonverbal cues act as regulators of the verbal cues, the researchers must be able to observe the facial expressions, the body orientation, the eye-contact, and the head movement of both interviewer and interviewee in conducting conversational analyses. While variables will not be manipulated or rigorously controlled, specific criteria will guide the collection of the video taped data.

Twelve historian/interviewers will be commissioned to produce split-screen video taped interviews with elite interviewees. Each interviewer will conduct four interviews--preferably two with female elite interviewees and two with male elite interviewees. Each interview will range from 60 to 180 minutes in length. Specific instructions will be provided for the technicians taping the interviews.

The second type of data to be used will be audio tapes of Stimulated Recall sessions with four interviewers and four interviewees. Stimulated Recall is a procedure whereby the research team will ask the interviewers and interviewees to view videotapes of their oral history interviews. During the sessions, the researchers will ask questions about the language used by the participants, about the

meaning derived from the talk about features of (Z), and about the functions of the nonverbal cues as they regulated the interpretation of the verbal discourse occurring during the interviews. Stimulated Recall sessions are conducted in order to move as closely to the participants' meanings of the interview conversations as is possible for observer/analyst(s). Serving as an internal check on the paradigm development, the results of the sessions will be integrated into the project as one means of refining the analytical paradigm for conversational analysis of oral history interviews.

The third type of data necessary to complete the project will be interviewers' free-response written descriptions of expected interview input and output. Each interviewer will prepare such a written account. These written accounts will be used as one basis for comparing the expected questions and responses with the actual questions and responses in the interviews. In the event that actual responses are incongruent with expected responses, the subsequent utterances will be revealing of the communicative and interpretational ability of interviewer and interviewee.

Developing Analytical Paradigms:

The oral history interview as a joint creation of (X) and (Y) is a hermeneutic process. Developing a paradigm for analyzing how talk between (X) and (Y) makes problematic the elitelore and thus articulates the lore so that it is no longer taken for granted requires the combined efforts of the historian, the specialist in philosophical hermeneutics, and the communication theorist on the research team.

During the pilot phase of the project, Hyde, McMahan, and Clark will analyze individually and collectively 12 video tapes and their

transcriptions. The analyses will be guided by four questions:

1. How does (X) articulate the historical record of (Z)?
2. How does (Y) articulate his participation in (Z)?
3. How does (Y) articulate the participation of others in (Z)?
4. How does (Y) articulate the significance of (Z) for himself, for other participants, and for history?

The procedure for answering the questions will be guided by the investigatory approach of Sacks.[20]

In "An Initial Investigation of the Usability of Conversational Data for Doing Sociology," Sacks discussed the Membership Category Device (MCD) as a tool for analyzing how members categorize people, thereby making meaningful those people and their relevant activities. A "device" he defined as a set of related categories plus rules for using the constituent categories. For example, Sacks attempted to describe how a suicidal person might reach the conclusion, "I have no one to turn to." In so doing, he described the collections of persons to which a suicidal person would turn. Such collections he called membership categories, and they included relational pairs such as husband-wife, parent-child, and friend-friend. Furthermore, he described how those relational pairs were used by suicidal persons in determining persons eligible to provide help. How the suicidal persons determined that eligibility, Sacks argued, revealed the rules of application or the usage rules regarding that collection of persons.

Jurick adapted the Sacks approach to a study of the "enactment of returning," (e.g., returning to one's high school). Jurick considered the membership category device as subsuming two specific devices: People Category Devices and Situation Category Devices.

These devices referred to activities in which people, through talk, categorize people and situations. In her research, people were categorized as "members, guests, outsiders, and strangers."[21] The situation was categorized in terms of its specificity and duration (i.e., past, present, future). Jurick demonstrated a "systemic relationship between people and situation categories" in that "previous talk categorizations of people and situations provide the basis on which current categorizations are based."[22]

Such an application of discourse analysis points to useful directions for investigating the hermeneutic process of meaning construction in the oral history interview. In addition to identifying other devices, the research team will seek to discover how (X) and (Y) elucidate (Z) through talk about features of that event, (Z_1.....Z_n). One procedure for formulating meaning about (Z) may be through the use of an Event Categorization Device, another subset of the Membership Category Device. Here the researchers will identify the utterances which the interviewee uses to explain features of the event and the utterances which the interviewer uses to articulate the historical record. The result will be the formulation of the categories and the usage rules operating as (X) and (Y) jointly create the meaning of (Z) for the historical record.

A related aspect of the initial investigation of the 12 videotapes will involve describing the organization of interaction between (X) and (Y). The research team will analyze how (X) and (Y) select features of (Z) for discussion. They, also, will formulate initial descriptions of the question/answer sequencing process occurring between (X) and (Y).

Identifying Variables

The research team and their assistants will conduct conversational analyses of the 36 video tapes and transcriptions using the analytical paradigm and the procedures developed during the pilot phase. These results will be subjected to comparative analyses for the purpose of answering the research questions posed.

The first research question asked: "What are the constitutive elements of the oral history interview?" Using the conversational analysis paradigm, the question will be answered by describing how the dialogue between (X) and (Y) makes problematic the elitelore and thus articulates the lore so that it is no longer taken for granted. This analytical procedure will generate two levels of description of the oral history interview process.[23]

The first level of description will identify the utterance units (phrases, sentences, clauses, or lexical items) which (X) and (Y) used to elucidate features of the event, i.e., $Z_1 \ldots Z_n$. Using the information gleaned from the Stimulated Recall sessions and the preliminary analysis, the researchers will produce a description of each utterance in the interviews. These descriptions will be used to interpret the function of each utterance and the resultant meaning within a stream of utterances about a feature of Z. In this phase of the project, the data essential to the second descriptive level which yields the constituent category devices in the oral history interviews will be derived.

This "second-order" description of the utterance units will produce the categories (and their usage rules) which function to elucidate features of (Z). If regularities in categories and usage rules are discovered across interviews, this will provide insight into the hermeneutic process of meaning construction, i.e., how (X) and (Y) jointly created the meaning of (Z). Such analytical grounding will present a vital

point of departure for theorizing about oral history interview communication.

The second research question focuses on a related aspect of communicative performance -- the rules governing the organization of interaction in the communicative performances of (X) and (Y) as they elucidate (Z).

The importance of discovering the rules of communicative performance is generally recognized.[24] The nature of the oral history interview suggests that two identifiable activities of communicative performance ought to be investigated. These are topic talk and insertion sequences.

Topic talk refers to the conversational activity, including its conditional rules, by which persons mutually influence the choice of the objects of the talk. Schegloff identified this activity as "co-selection of features for topic," suggesting that the process of selecting features of topic which "go together" means that the features "in their co-selection...in part, constitute the topic."[25]

Litton-Hawes described the rules of topic talk occurring between doctors and patients in medical interviews. She found the "doctor question rule" to take precedence over all other rules. This rule states: "When in a question a doctor asked about a topic (X), a patient is obligated to imply topic (X)."[26] Furthermore, the topic co-selection which is based on the "doctor question rule" lends insight into the nature of the medical interview. That is, the medical interview can be viewed as a negotiation process in which "... the doctor can take the patient's problem and turn it into something he/she can deal with successfully."[27]

Likewise, we believe that inquiry into the conditional rules of topic co-selection in the oral history interview will reveal insights

about the process of creating an historical record. Specifically, we will ask how (X) and (Y) co-select features of (Z), i.e., $Z_1 \ldots Z_n$, as they seek to recreate the event.

At the conclusion of the preliminary search for topic categories in the 12 video tapes and transcriptions, nine video tapes and transcriptions will be examined for topic categories. Any changes indicated by this examination will be made. The researchers will describe their reasons for selecting the topic categories as well as their assumptions about how the topic talk functioned.

As the researchers integrate their findings, they will refine and test the categories by applying them to additional video tapes and transcriptions. Ultimately, the team will formulate usage rules or principles of topic talk.[28] After describing the topic talk, the organization of utterances occurring in the oral history interviews will be examined.

Schegloff demonstrated that conversations repeatedly reflect an organization of utterances which he called a "sequence." Sacks referred to a similar organization of utterances as "utterance pairs."[29] A sequence or utterance pair represents two utterances which are related in such a way that one utterance is conditionally relevant on the occurrence of another utterance:

> When one utterance (A) is conditionally relevant on another (S), then the occurrence of S provides for the relevance of the occurrence of A. If A occurs, it occurs (i.e. is produced and heard) as "responsive" to S, i.e. in a serial or sequenced relation to it; and, if it does not occur, its non-occurrence is an event, i.e. it is not only non-occurring..., it is "notably" absent.[30]

The "summons-answer" sequence in a greeting is an example of the

"conditional relevance" of an utterance pair. Similarly, the "question-answer" sequence reflects such a structure.

Since the "question-answer" sequence is central to the conduct of an interview, the researchers are interested in describing how the question-answer sequences "show themselves" in the construction of meaning. When an interviewee responds to a question with a seemingly unrelated answer, that answer is the beginning of an insertion sequence. Determining whether the sequence is relevant to past or future utterances in the interview is important in ascertaining the overall construction of meaning.

Using a procedure similar to that used to describe topic talk, the research team will describe and compare the question-answer sequences and the insertion sequences occurring in the 36 oral history interviews. In addition, the conversational sequencing will be compared with each interviewer's expectations as revealed in the Interviewer Expectation Forms.

Question three asks, "What patterns of conversation categories and of conversational sequencing approximate the paradigm of hermeneutical conversation?" After establishing sufficient intra-rater and inter-rater reliability for coding the dialectical logic described by Hyde, comparative analyses of actual interaction patterns and the dialectical logic will be made.[31] These analyses will reveal how (X) and (Y) articulated conflict and constructed meaning concerning (Z). It is expected that differences will be discovered in the interviews in terms of the ways in which (X) and (Y) achieved hermeneutical conversation. Such findings would serve as grounds for identifying relevant communication variables and concommitant research hypotheses about oral history interviewing.

While we could speculate about those communication variables and the hypotheses, we choose to remain consistent with Kockelmans' view that observation, description, and identification of variables precede theory construction and testing. Nevertheless, the data and the conclusions produced by all of the above analyses will combine to produce the answer to question four: "What historical evidence is generated as interviewer and interviewee recreate the event?"

One obvious by-product of the conversational analyses will be the identification of historical evidence such as causal explanations, motives, and ideologies. However, historical evidence cannot be interpreted apart from the context in which it was generated. Thus, to identify and to understand those data presupposes the proposed descriptive analyses. Until the hermeneutic process of meaning construction unfolding during the oral history interview is described, the meaning of the historical evidence, regardless of its form, will remain problematic. By asking how the evidence emerged as a joint creation of (X) and (Y) as they sought to elucidate their separate understandings, interpretations, and meanings of (Z), we shall provide a description of the historical evidence as well as a means for interpreting those oral data. The result will provide a theoretical base and concommitant procedures for understanding communicative performances constituting the synchronic dimension of the hermeneutic process.

Conclusion

The use of hermeneutic theory for investigating problems of interpretation has been confined traditionally to the written word. We believe our research offers important directives for showing how such a tradition can be extended to include the praxis of oral discourse. Our decision to limit this extension to an investigation of the oral history interview is intended as a beginning for showing the importance and applicability of hermeneutics as a research tool in human communication. Since the pragmatics of human communication is essentially a hermeneutic process, that is, a process wherein people interpret their world so that it can be understood in a meaningful way, the further use of hermeneutic theory in communication research should be encouraged.

NOTES

[1]Hans Jonas, "Change and Permanence: On the Possibility of Understanding History," Social Research, 38 (1971), p. 513.

[2]Joseph Roddy, "Oral History: Soundings from the Sony Age," RF Illustrated, III (May, 1977), p. 9.

[3]Waddy Moore, "From the President," Oral History Association Newsletter, 12 (Winter, 1978), p. 2.

[4]Ronald J. Grele, "Movement Without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History," in Ronald J. Grele, ed., Envelopes of Sound (Chicago: Precedent Publishing Inc., 1975), p. 132-133.

[5]Ibid. p. 136.

[6]Moore, p. 2.

[7]Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 141.

[8]Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, ed. Garrett Barden and John Cumming, (New York: The Seaburg Press, 1975), p. 20.

[9]For a discussion of erlebnis, see Alfred Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, tr. George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967).

[10]Grele, p. 142.

[11]See Joseph Kockelmans, "Toward an Interpretative or Hermeneutic Social Science," New School for Social Research Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal, 5 (Fall, 1975), pp. 73-96.

[12]James Wilkie, Elitelore (Los Angeles: Latin American Center, 1973), p. 16.

[13]Schutz, p. 74.

[14]See Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); Hans-Georg Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics, tr. David E. Linge, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1976); Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, ed. Garrett Barden and John Cumming, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975); Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning, (Fort Worth, Texas: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976); and Paul Ricoeur, The Conflict of Interpretations, Essays in Hermeneutics, ed. Don Ihde, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

[15]Gerhard Ebeling, The Problem of Historicity, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 26

[16]Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 410.

[17]Ibid., p. 330.

[18]Ibid., p. 324ff.

[19]Michael J. Hyde, "Paradox: Toward a Prescriptive Theory of Communication," Unpublished Dissertation, Purdue University, Department of Speech Communication, August, 1977.

[20]See Harvey Sacks, "An Initial Investigation of the Usability of Conversational Data for Doing Sociology," in Studies in Social Interaction, ed. David Sudnow, (New York: The Free Press, 1972), pp. 31-74.

[21]Donna Jurick, "The Enactment of Returning: A Naturalistic Study of Talk," Communication Quarterly, 25 (Summer, 1977), p. 26.

[22]Ibid., p. 29.

[23]See Robert E. Nofsinger, Jr., "A Peek At Conversational Analysis," Communication Quarterly, 25 (Summer, 1977), pp. 12-20.

[24]See Starkey Duncan and Donald Fiske, Face-toFace Interaction: Research Methods and Theory, (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1977); Emanuel A. Schegloff, "Notes on a Conversational Practice: Formulating Place," in Studies in Social Interaction, ed. David Sudnow, (New York: The Free Press, 1972), pp. 75-119; and William Labov, "Rules for Ritual Insults," in Studies in Social Interaction, ed. David Sudnow, pp. 120-169.

[25]Schegloff, "Notes on a Conversational Practice: Formulating Place," p. 80.

[26]Elaine M. Litton-Hawes, "A Discourse Analysis of Topic Co-Selection in Medical Interviews," Unpublished Dissertation, The Ohio State University, Department of Speech Communication, 1976, p. 60.

[27]Ibid., p. 93.

[28]The procedure for describing topic talk follows the general guidelines set forth by Litton-Hawes, "A Discourse Analysis of Topic Co-Selection In Medical Interviews," pp. 44-49.

[29]Schegloff, "Notes on a Conversational Practice: Formulating Place," p. 76.

[30]Ibid.

[31]See Harold Guetzkow, "Unitizing and Categorizing Problems in Coding Qualitative Data," Journal of Clinical Psychology, 6 (1950), pp. 47-50.